



## Cultural awareness among ethnic patients - Methodological challenges in narrative inquiry

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## **Cultural awareness among ethnic minority patients**

### **- methodological challenges in narrative inquiry**

This paper discusses a number of methodological challenges in relation to narrative inquiry among ethnic minority patients admitted to a hospital ward in Denmark. The overall purpose of the project is to explore how health professionals and patients from a variety of cultures talk about and enact culture.

Although nursing sites have been studied extensively by nursing professionals, it seems that few studies have been undertaken by discourse analysts (S. Candlin, 1997; N. Candlin and S. Candlin 2003: 144). Exceptions are studies of doctor-patient relationship (Roberts 2006; Sarangi and Brookes-Howell, 2006) and Candlin & Candlin's study of nurse-patient encounters (2007). What distinguishes our project from most other studies within the field is that we want to explore the interaction between patients and health professionals from a patients' perspective, and because 'the narrative interview captures the extraordinary and offers interviewees an opportunity for relating difficult situations in which they feel disempowered' (Just 2006: 164) the narrative approach would seem ideal.

While the narrative approach seemed to work well with the nursing staff, most of the ethnic minority patients did not respond without repeated prompting. The difference might be a result of the nursing staff and the patients belonging to different 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991, in Candlin and Candlin 2007: 245), which raises latent issues of membership and belonging in the light of prevailing social structures in Danish society. At the same time our results invite a discussion of power relations among nursing staff, patients and researchers, given the asymmetry indicated by the relative vagueness in patients responses compared to those of the nursing staff. Against this background we shall argue that the methodological problems we encountered may be a result of a number of contextual parameters influencing the interview situation. We will illustrate this point by discussing some of these, and in the process we will suggest alternative methodological approaches.

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